

R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 010 870

AC 000 493

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA.
BY- CORTRIGHT, RICHARD W.

FUB DATE 66

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.09 HC-\$0.60 15P.

DESCRIPTORS- *LITERACY, *ADULT BASIC EDUCATION, *DEVELOPING
NATIONS, ILLITERACY, LATIN AMERICA

THE AUTHOR BRIEFLY REVIEWS STUDIES AND REPORTS ON ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN LATIN AMERICA, WHERE IN MOST COUNTRIES AT LEAST 40 PERCENT OF THE ADULT POPULATION IS ILLITERATE. EDUCATION HAS BEEN RELATED TO NATIONAL ECONOMIES, HEALTH, AND SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS. NATIONAL BUDGETS FOR LITERACY PROGRAMS ARE GROWING AND IN SOME COUNTRIES INDUSTRIES HAVE AIDED LITERACY EDUCATION. ADULT PROGRAMS HAVE INCLUDED CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WHO WORK A FULL DAY. THE QUESTION OF WHETHER TO INVEST MORE IN ADULT OR ELEMENTARY PROGRAMS RECURS. THE PEACE CORPS HAS BEEN HELPFUL IN TRAINING TEACHERS OF ILLITERATES AND IN INITIATING PROGRAMS. NUMEROUS REFERENCES ARE MADE TO DOCUMENTS IN ENGLISH, SPANISH, PORTUGUESE, AND FRENCH. THIS ARTICLE CONTAINS SUMMARIES IN FRENCH AND GERMAN AND IS PUBLISHED IN THE "INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF EDUCATION," VOLUME 12, NUMBER 2, 1966. (JA)

Vol. XII / 1966 / No. 2

LAWRENCE A. CREMIN, NEW YORK / H. LIONEL ELVIN, LONDON
ROGER GAL, PARIS / G. HAUSMANN, HAMBURG / TOKIOMI KAIGO, TOKYO
M. J. LANGEVELD, UTRECHT / GUSTAF ÖGREN, UNESCO INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATION

ED020870

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW
OF EDUCATION

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INTERNATIONALE ZEITSCHRIFT
FÜR ERZIEHUNGSWISSENSCHAFT

* * *

REVUE INTERNATIONALE
DE PÉDAGOGIE

UNESCO INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATION, / INSTITUT DE L'UNESCO POUR L'EDUCATION
UNESCO-INSTITUT FÜR PÄDAGOGIK, HAMBURG

MARTINUS NIJHOFF, 'S-GRAVENHAGE

AC 000 493

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

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ADULT BASIC EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA

by RICHARD W. CORTRIGHT, Washington

In most countries in Latin America at least forty per cent of the adult population is illiterate. UNESCO reported the following percentages of adult illiteracy in 1957, the last comprehensive world statistical survey on illiteracy.¹⁾ By 1962 probably fifty million adults were illiterate in Latin America.²⁾

	All Ages	Adults	% Adult Illiterate
Middle America	51 million	30 million	40-42
South America	111 million	67 million	42-44

Education, including adult basic education, has recently become a significant subject for study by economists. Harbison and Myers have considered education itself an important industry, a large employer, and a fast-growing multiplier effect in emerging nations.³⁾ No longer is education considered *sui generis*. The importance of the eradication or diminution of illiteracy in Latin America is underlined by the fact that national budgets for education have been including more funds for literacy (adult basic education) programs.

Various studies have been made concerning the problem of illiteracy in Latin America. Benitez (1959) related illiteracy in Latin America with high mortality.⁴⁾ Smith (1957) correlated the Latin American attitude toward *latifundismo* and *minifundismo* with illiteracy and thereby implied the need for increased literacy in Latin America as one basis for diminishing social and political ills.⁵⁾

Other studies have been concerned primarily with the statistical extent of local programs. Since some programs have undoubtedly been motivated by political or quasi-political considerations, such statistics are open to verification. Venezuela was reported to have taught 1,300,000 adults to

¹⁾ *Illiteracy at Mid-Century*. Paris: Unesco 1957, p. 13.

²⁾ *Panorama IV*, No. 1, September, 1962, p. 1.

³⁾ Frederick HARRISON and Charles MYERS: *Education, Manpower, and Economic Growth*. New York: McGraw Hill and Company 1964, p. 10. See also Eduardo HAMUY: *Educación Elemental Analfabetismo y Desarrollo Económico*. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria 1960.

⁴⁾ Zentino R. BENITEZ: "Tabla de Vida en la Republica Mexicana, Comparaciones de la Sobrevivencia de 1930, 1940, 1950", *Revista Mexicana Sociologica* (1959).

⁵⁾ T. Lynn SMITH: "Current Social Trends and Problems in Latin America", *Latin American Monographs Number One*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press 1957.

read in four years and to have expected to overcome all illiteracy within four years.¹⁾ Cuba was reported to have conducted a successful campaign against illiteracy in the 1961 Año de Educación. One of the few careful analyses of literacy campaigns in Latin America which is available concerns the economic implications of this campaign and the measurement of the success of the campaign against its stated goals.²⁾

In some countries in Latin America considerable attention has been paid to the history of literacy campaigns. Probably Mexico has been most consistently involved in such studies. A history of programs in Mexico since 1922 has been documented by the Secretary of Public Education.³⁾ Beginning with the first serious program under Obregon in 1922, some fifteen thousand adults were taught to read. In 1936 Cardenas appointed a National Commission for Peoples' Education in which about 225,000 adults were eventually taught. In 1944 Camacho proclaimed an Emergency Law which initiated the National Campaign Against Illiteracy. Careful study has also been given to local literacy programs in Mexico.⁴⁾

The experience of graduates and students at CREFAL (*Centro Regional para la Educación Fundamental para la America Latina*) has been extensive. Based on his experiences at CREFAL, Gómez studied means for reaching the adult illiterates in rural Colombia.⁵⁾

Thomason studied Ecuadorian rural villages and discovered that a nation-wide attempt in mass communication, which tried to be all things to all people, had little impact. However, when radio broadcasts were written for local communities, they could be successful when they had maximum impact – impact to induce change and modify attitudes and when they were combined with visual media – to inform and teach effectively.⁶⁾

Another kind of new educational technology, educational television, has been initiated to carry adult basic education programs in Latin Ameri-

¹⁾ *Comparative Education Review* VIII, No. 1, June, 1964, p. 112.

²⁾ Richard JOLLY: "The Literacy Campaign and Adult Education", in Dudley Seers (Ed.) *Cuba, The Economic and Social Revolution*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press 1964, pp. 190-219. For an analysis of the educational material used in the Cuban campaign, see Richard W. CORTRIGHT, "Venceremos-Says Cuba". 1964, mimeo.

³⁾ Director General de Alfabetización y Educación Extraescolar: *Informe de labores y nuevos lineamientos*. Mexico: Secretaría de Educación Pública 1956, pp. 19 ff.

⁴⁾ P. J. MURILLO: "Seis años de alfabetización en Zacateca", *Reivindicación Mexicana* XIX, October, 1950, pp. 10 ff.

⁵⁾ Gabriela Anzola GÓMEZ: *Como llegar hasta los campesinos por medio de la educación*. Bogotá: Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia 1956.

⁶⁾ Florence S. THOMASON: "Research in Audiovisual Communication in Latin America". A Report Presented at the International Session of the Division of Audiovisual Instruction, National Education Association General Meeting. Rochester, New York: April 20, 1964, p. 6.

ca. A series was programmed for the Dominican Republic and another was initiated for Colombia in cooperation with the Peace Corps and the *Fundación Alfabetizadora Laubach*. A third has been undertaken by the *Fundação João Baptista do Amraval* in Rio de Janeiro.¹⁾ The Brazilian program was first transmitted in 1962. Eventually seventy-eight taped programs were kinescoped. Showings were held for the military, at industrial environments, as well as in academic settings.

The Division of the Inter-American Cooperative Service in Bolivia has worked since World War II in developing techniques and administration for industrial arts programs for youth and adults.²⁾ In some cases students were included who were adolescents or who were as young as ten or eleven years but who had adult responsibilities.

Similar experiences are representative of the fact that adolescent illiteracy in Latin America is part of adult basic education. At the *Casa de Alfabetización* in the Estado de Mexico shepherd boys who worked a full day were included in the night classes although these classes had been ostensibly organized for adults.

Whether to invest in adult education or elementary education has been a recurrent problem in Latin America. It has been difficult to enforce compulsory education laws. Investment in elementary education has not necessarily paid off. The question has been whether or not there would be greater economic pay-off from programs for adults since adults could be fed more directly and quickly than children into the productive stream of society.³⁾

In Brazil the rate of literacy has improved significantly since World War II, but probably not more than half of the population over five years of age is literate. Brazil in this regard is representative of the crucial problem facing any increase in adult basic education in Latin America: the fantastic increase in population.

At least forty per cent of the population is under fifteen years of age, compared with twenty-five per cent in Western Europe and thirty-one per cent in the United States. In 1965 an estimated 9.92 million babies were born in Latin America.⁴⁾ The problem of providing enough food is a large enough problem, but the problem of providing food for the minds is overwhelming. Facilities for providing a broad-based educational system in Latin America which is capable of providing effective republican

¹⁾ Alfredina DE PAIVA E SOUZA: "A Brazilian Experiment", *Education Panorama* VII, No. 1, 1965, pp. 24-25.

²⁾ Edwin D. GROVES: "Industrial Arts Education in Rural Bolivia", *Industrial Arts and Vocational Education* XLV, October, 1956, pp. 247-253.

³⁾ Dalilla C. SPERB: "Elementary Education versus Illiteracy in Brazil", *Teachers College Record* LVIII, December, 1956, pp. 169-174.

⁴⁾ *Demographic Yearbook*. New York: United Nations 1964.

institutions is sorely taxed by the demands of increased population. The President of the National Bank of Economic Development of Brazil, Glycon de Paiva, has said that the "great spoliative agent of Brazilian economy is ...the undesired child, the adolescent that invades our lives in a number geometrically growing, repressing the development and exhausting the nation..."¹⁾

To meet the population problem various development plans have been proposed; some have been implemented. One actualized program is in Guatemala at Nahuala in the Departamento de Solola, a pilot center for radiophonic schools trying experimental literacy programs. *La Voz de Nahuala* beams its programs to fifty-five radiophonic schools. Each school has a radio receiver. Each school has two assistant teachers, "líderes," who have been trained to follow the instruction given over the radio program.²⁾

In Venezuela the *Division Nacional de Educación de Adultos* has set up a new kind of school for men between fourteen and twenty years of age. The school is an economic unit which combines learning-through-work with general education. Mexico also has a special kind of school for adolescents who have not completed their formal schooling.³⁾ Adult basic education is needed for lower level manpower needs.

Latin American educators are the first to state that all is not well at present in adult basic education. Much greater stress needs to be given to this kind of education in order to make it an integral part of long-range educational planning. Too much attention has been given to administrative structure. Díez-Hochleitner has stated that "the need for literacy programs is evident, but too much on the surface of the total program... (only) gradually, the idea of literacy as an instrument... a very essential tool... is being accepted; but the need to provide skills to give these adults a chance to contribute to the social and economic development of their own country effectively is now being recognized more and more."⁴⁾

From 1955 to 1965 there has been a large increase in the number of illiterates in various Latin American countries. Several reasons may account for this increase: (1) the population explosion; (2) the lack of

¹⁾ Dorothy L. NORTMAN: *The Population Problem*. New York: National Education Television 1965, pp. 12-18.

²⁾ *Analfabeticemos en Guatemala*. Guatemala: Fundación Alfabetizadora Laubach para Guatemala 1965, p. 5.

³⁾ Francisco C. CESPEDES: "The Contemporary Educational Scene in Latin America", in *Challenges and Achievements of Education in Latin America*. Washington, D.C.: General Secretary of the Organization of the American States 1964, pp. 43-46.

⁴⁾ Ricardo Díez-HOCHLEITNER: "Educational Planning", in *Challenges and Achievements*, p. 52.

budgeting funds for adult education; (3) the lack of trained teachers, school facilities, and effective educational planning. In Colombia as well as Peru industrial cooperation has taken place. For example, in the Departamento of Antioquia (Colombia) twelve different industrial concerns have formed a literacy junta which has pledged funds for teacher training and the preparation of educational materials for adult new readers. A Colombian law stipulates that a student of a *collegio* at the fifth and sixth grade must have been certified that he has taught adult literacy for at least seventy-two hours. The result is that various *collegio* students have been trained to teach illiterates. Sometimes this training was provided by Peace Corps Volunteers. Volunteers have been active in working with Latin American counterparts after having been trained in adult basic education at universities in the United States. In Bogotá literacy classes are held at construction sites since employers have discovered that illiterates increase danger hazards to themselves and to others. Some workers come before work and continue after work in order to improve their reading skills. Other classes are held in prisons, in housing projects, and in rural schools.¹⁾ These examples reiterate the accepted dictum recently put by Furter: *L'analphabétisme ne peut donc être une fin en soi, car c'est la fin d'un commencement.*²⁾

The new UNESCO World Campaign for Universal Literacy involving Latin America will begin in Ecuador. Students of international education in Latin America will watch this new effort as well as the results of the Teheran conference on illiteracy with considerable interest. Illiteracy presents a threat in fact to the current United Nations Development Decade since the illiterate is the weak chain in national development.³⁾

Furthermore, recent research supports the hypothesis that literacy underlies the process of modernization in emerging societies. In a study of Guatemalan illiterates Méndez and Waisanen reported that the relationship of functional literacy to sex, age, ethnic group, occupation, education, and income was uniformly significant beyond the .005 level.⁴⁾ If so, then literacy must be increased in Latin America.

It has become clear that the obstacles to a literate Latin America are

¹⁾ Report of the Fundación Alfabetizadora Laubach de Colombia, June 22, 1965, mimeo.

²⁾ Pierre FURTER: "Contribution à l'Etude de l'Analphabétisme", *International Review of Education*, Vol. XI/3, 1965, pp. 267.

³⁾ Richard GREENOUGH: "Illiteracy - Weak Link in the Chain of Development", *Freedom from Hunger* VI, No. 37, July-August, 1965, p. 5. See also *UNESCO Chronicle* XI, No. 1, January, 1965, p. 32.

⁴⁾ C. Alfredo MÉNDEZ, D. and F. B. WAISANEN: "Some Correlates of Functional Literacy", Address at the 1964 Congress of the Interamerican Society for Psychology.

numerous, but not overwhelming – if curbs to the vast increase of population are carried out successfully, if the wisdom of integrated long-range functional education planning includes adult basic education, and if effective educational materials are produced. The next decade should show positive gains.

A statistical summary of certain factors concerning adult basic education in Latin America concludes this discussion:^{1,2)}

Population

300 million (1975); 600 million (2000)

Annual Per Capita Income

Latin American average: \$270; Central American average: \$200.

School Attendance

One of the potential school population is in school.

One half of the population of fifteen years and over has completed only one year of school.

Book Industry

Average book edition is from 500 to two or three thousand copies.

Literacy

Forty per cent illiteracy for the continent.

From twenty per cent to nearly seventy per cent illiteracy among the population ten years of age or more, except Argentina.

Reading Levels

Twenty per cent: Functional literates whose progress depends on available educational materials of interest to them.

Twenty per cent: Threshold literates who need simple materials on which to build their reading skill.

Fifty-eight per cent: Learner readers who are still at the instructional stage.

More specifically, the statistics by country show a wide spread of percentages of illiteracy as well as a wide range of dates of last available census data. Those nations reporting more recently were the following:³⁾

¹⁾ *Why Low-Cost Books in Spanish and Portuguese for Children, Young People and New Adult Literates in Latin America*. Fact Sheet One, Washington, D.C.: Books for the People Fund, Inc., February 23, 1962.

²⁾ *Reading Ability of Latin American Population*. Fact Sheet Five Washington, D.C.: Books for the People Fund, Inc., February 5, 1963.

³⁾ *América en Cifras 1963 Situación Cultural*, Volumen V, *Educación y Otros Aspectos Culturales*. Washington, D.C.: Union Panamericana, Organización de los Estados Americanos, p. 5.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Percentage of Literacy</i>
Costa Rica	1963	84
Chile	1960	83.6
El Salvador	1961	48
Honduras	1961	46.9
Mexico	1960	62.2
Panama	1960	78.3
Peru	1961	60.1
Venezuela	1961	64.5

GRUNDERZIEHUNG FÜR ERWACHSENE IN LATEINAMERIKA

VON RICHARD W. CORTRIGHT, Washington

Wahrscheinlich gibt es mindestens 50 Millionen funktionale Analphabeten in Lateinamerika. Die unzureichende Bildung ist dort ein großes erzieherisches Problem und hat weitreichende wirtschaftliche, soziale und politische Auswirkungen.

Einige Untersuchungen über das Analphabetentum (Grunderziehung für Erwachsene) haben den Zusammenhang mit verschiedenen sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Problemen aufgezeigt. Andere haben in erster Linie einen Überblick über bestehende Programme und zusammenfassende Statistiken über Lokalprogramme gegeben. Einige historische Studien bestanden aus einer Längsschnittuntersuchung von Programmen, die sich über mehr als 40 Jahre erstreckt.

Technische Hilfsmittel wie das Bildungsfernsehen hat man in einigen Ländern Lateinamerikas eingesetzt, um das Analphabetentum zu bekämpfen. In anderen Ländern sind Lehrgänge in Verbindung mit Berufsausbildungskursen oder mit Abendschulen durchgeführt worden. Zum Teil hat die Industrie ihre eigenen Programme zur Überwindung des Analphabetentums entwickelt. Das Friedenskorps hat mit lateinamerikanischen Partner-Organisationen zusammen für eine erfolgreiche institutionelle Grunderziehung für Erwachsene gearbeitet. In anderen Gegenden hat man größeren Wert auf die Entwicklung angemessener Lehrmittel für schon laufende Kurse gelegt.

In engem Zusammenhang mit einer erfolgreichen Beseitigung oder Verminderung des Analphabetentums in Lateinamerika steht das Problem der Bevölkerungsexplosion. Hervorragende lateinamerikanische Pädagogen haben dies klar erkannt und sich für geeignete Schritte zur Lösung dieses Problems, das sich dem Fortschritt in der Erziehung entgegenstellt, eingesetzt. Ein weiteres Problem ist das Fehlen eines auf weite Sicht geplanten Programms zur Grunderziehung für Erwachsene im Rahmen der Gesamtbildungsplanung eines Landes. Ohne eine solche Bildungsplanung ignoriert oder mißachtet man die Erwachsenen. Wenn jedoch diese Fragen gelöst werden, weist alles darauf hin, daß der Grunderziehung für Erwachsene in Lateinamerika ein größerer Erfolg als bisher beschieden sein wird.

EDUCATION FONDAMENTALE DES ADULTES EN AMERIQUE LATINE

par RICHARD W. CORTRIGHT, Washington

Il y a vraisemblablement en Amérique Latine au moins 50 millions d'analphabètes fonctionnels. L'insuffisance en éducation y constitue un des grands problèmes éducatifs et a des répercussions dans les domaines économiques, sociaux et politiques.

Quelques recherches sur l'analphabétisme (éducation fondamentale des adultes) ont montré la relation qui existait entre ce dernier et différents problèmes sociaux et économiques. D'autres ont donné en premier lieu une vue d'ensemble des programmes existants et des statistiques synthétiques des programmes régionaux. Quelques études historiques portaient sur une enquête verticale de programmes qui s'étendent sur plus de 40 ans.

Dans la domaine de la technique on a appliqué, dans quelques pays d'Amérique Latine, les émissions de télévision éducative pour combattre l'analphabétisme. Dans d'autres pays de tels programmes furent appliqués en relation avec les cours de formation professionnelle ou des cours du soir. De son côté l'industrie a partiellement développé ses propres programmes pour la lutte contre l'analphabétisme.

Le "Peace Corps" s'est également occupé, en collaboration avec des organisations d'Amérique Latine, de la question d'un enseignement fondamental efficace pour les adultes. Dans d'autres régions on a attaché une grande valeur au développement des bases appropriées à l'éducation dans des cours ultérieurs.

En relation avec la suppression efficace ou la diminution de l'analphabétisme en Amérique Latine se trouve le problème de l'explosion de la population.

Des pédagogues réputés d'Amérique Latine ont reconnu ce fait et se sont efforcés de trouver une solution adéquate à ce problème qui s'oppose au progrès dans l'enseignement.

Un autre problème est l'absence d'un programme d'éducation fondamentale pour adultes à longue échéance dans le cadre du plan de l'éducation générale d'un pays. A défaut d'un tel plan on néglige ou méprise les adultes. Ce n'est que si cette question était résolue, que l'éducation fondamentale pour adultes en Amérique Latine connaîtrait un succès plus grand qu'auparavant.

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INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF EDUCATION
INTERNATIONALE ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR ERZIEHUNGSWISSENSCHAFT
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An average volume of the review contains 512 pages yearly, in four issues / Jeder Band der Zeitschrift umfasst 512 Seiten jährlich in vier Heften / Chaque volume de la revue comporte 512 pages par an, en quatre fascicules.

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29 Guilders = 58s. = \$ 8.10 = DM 32 = N.F. 39,50
Separate issues / Einzelhefte / Le fascicule:
3.25 Guilders = 16s.6d. = \$ 2.30 = DM 9.15 = N.F. 11,20

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Seidmann, Peter, Moderne Formen der Lehrerweiterbildung (A. St. Langeland, Oslo)	244
Teutsch, Gotthard M., Soziologie der pädagogischen Umwelt (S. Wiegersma, Leiderdorp).	246
Thomae, Hans, Die Motivation menschlichen Handelns (Kurt R. Scherer, Köln)	227
Thut, I. N. and Don Adams, Educational Patterns in Contemporary Societies (Richard F. Goodings, Durham)	246
Wallace, J. G., Concept Growth and the Education of the Child (J. B. Biggs, Armidale, Australia)	248
<i>Publications Received – Eingegangene Veröffentlichungen – Publications Reçues . .</i>	<i>252</i>
<i>Notes on Contributors – Die Autoren – Index des Collaborateurs</i>	<i>255</i>

Contents — Inhalt — Table des Matières

ADULT EDUCATION AND SWEDISH POLITICAL LEADERSHIP, Herman Erickson, Champaign, USA	129
WANDLUNGEN DER ERWACHSENENBILDUNG IN DER BUNDES- REPUBLIK DEUTSCHLAND, Hans Tietgens, Frankfurt	144
L'EDUCATION PERMANENTE EN BELGIQUE D'EXPRESSION FRANÇAISE, Marcel Deprez, Liège.	159
ADULT BASIC EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA, Richard W. Cort- right, Washington	176
THE ELITIST AND THE POPULAR IDEAL — PREFECTS AND MO- NITORS IN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS, M. A. Eckstein, New York	184

Communications — Berichte — Communications

In memoriam Alv Langeland (Willi Koelle, Hamburg)	196
Trends in Adult Education in India (S. C. Dutta, New Delhi)	197
Adult Education in Liberia (Robert Smith, Washington)	202
Berufsausbildung in Tunesien — Beginn einer Reform (Werner Plum, Hamburg)	212
A Society for Educational Theory and Research — Founded in Prague (Vlastimil Pařízek, Prague)	218
Plans for an Electronic Communications Network (CIC West Lafayette, USA)	219

Book Reviews — Buchbesprechungen — Analyses Bibliographiques

A.A.C.T.E., Teacher Education — Looks to the Future (Sixten Marklund, Stock- holm)	221
Bantock, G. H., Education and Values (Franz Hilker, Bonn)	223
Bibliothèque de l'Institut Belge de Science Politique, Structures et Régimes de l'Enseignement dans divers Pays (R. F. Goodings, Durham)	250
Canfield Fisher, Dorothy, Montessori for Parents (Marjorie L. Jenkins, Woking- ham, England)	223
Canfield Fisher, Dorothy, The Montessori Manual for Teachers and Parents (Marjorie L. Jenkins, Wokingham)	223
Filler, Louis, Horace Mann on the Crisis in Education (Franz Hilker, Bonn)	225
Fraser, Stewart, Chinese Communist Education: Records of the First Decade (Franklin Parker, Norman, USA)	226
Graumann, Carl Friedrich, Denken (Kurt R. Scherer, Köln)	227
Greenstein, Fred I., Children and Politics (Gustav Jahoda, Glasgow)	230
Henz, Hubert, Lehrbuch der systematischen Pädagogik (M. J. Langeveld, Utrecht)	231
Jürgens, Hans W., Familiengröße und Bildungsweg (Karl Henrik Eriksson, Lin- köping)	233
Kneller, George F., Existentialism and Education (Franz Hilker, Bonn)	233
Kneller, George F., Introduction to the Philosophy of Education (Nicholas Hans, London)	235
McGrath, Earl J., The Predominantly Negro Colleges and Universities in Tran- sition (Gilbert de Landsheere, Liège)	236
Meyer, Adolphe E., An Educational History of the Western World (Franklin Parker, Norman, USA)	237
Moor, Paul, Heilpädagogik (M. J. Langeveld, Utrecht)	238
Nash, Paul, Kazamias, Andreas M., Perkinson, Henry J., The Educated Man: Studies in the History of Educational Thought (Franz Hilker, Bonn)	239
Nummenmaa, Tapio, and Takala, Martti, assisted by Ylimentalo, Oliva, Parental Behavior and Sources of Information in Different Social Groups (Leslie D. McLean, New York)	240
Palmer, F. Claude, Student Guidance (J. Cambon, Paris)	242
Sjöstrand, Wilhelm, Pedagogikens Historia (M. J. Langeveld, Utrecht)	244

Cont'd on inside cover